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Contestation and Curriculum: The Efforts of Chinese Patriots in Hong Kong, 1946–1984

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By restoring the memories of collective struggles over the colonial government education and by analyzing the curriculum of the patriotic schools, I aim to demonstrate the power of school itself in reconstructing an alternative curriculum in an apolitical and de-nationalistic Hong Kong. The education system is constantly struggling over the meaning of its goals, its contents, its operations and its assessments. As Lau Siu-kai suggested in the 1980s, Hong Kong appeared as a minimally-integrated social-political system, where utilitarianistic familism and apolitical attitude were prevailed. Through this cross-disciplinary research, we have witnessed the formation and consolidation of an anti-hegemonic nationalistic curriculum appeared in local patriotic schools during the period of 1946–1984.

Key words: alternative nationalistic curriculum, counter-hegemony, power of school

Introduction

The social history of patriotic schools showed the autonomous forces of the educational system. By restoring the memories of collective struggles over the colonial government education and by analyzing the curriculum of the patriotic schools, I aim to demonstrate the power of school itself in reconstructing an alternative nationalistic curriculum in Hong Kong.

The education system is constantly struggling over the meaning of its goals, its contents, its operations and its assessments (Beyer & Apple, 1998). Although scholars such as Green (1990) and Curtis (1988) pose education as a dependent variable determined by the dominant groups, other scholars, in this case, do not simply consider education as mere exercise of forces of the government.

This research also reflects the social inventions and ongoing social constructions taken place in Hong Kong during the period of the 1940s to 1980s. Post-war Hong Kong experienced an intensification of industrialization, urbanization and immigration. Hong Kong education in its colonial years obviously strived to serve its industrial and commercial needs. It was characterized by features such as apoliticalisation (Leung, 1997), denationalization (Wong, 2002) and utilitarianistic familism (Lau, 1984) that emanated from the tension arisen in the paradox of a colonial regime of a capitalist state of the United Kingdom adjoining with a communist hinterland of China. The government's intention to keep education and curriculum apolitical and a-nationalistic was explicit. These educational approaches inevitably provoked determined resistance from local patriotic forces during the colonial era.

During the turn of the 20th century, there was certainly no lack of patriotism and Chinese nationalism in Hong Kong. The border between two territories of the mainland and of the Colony was open without any restriction until the 1950s. Lau Siu-kai pointed out the local Chinese shared similar ethnic-cultural identification with their counterparts in the mainland on the eve of resumption of Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong (Lau, 1997). Regardless the similarities in ethnic-cultural identification, the form and the expression of their Chinese nationalism

and nationalistic identity nevertheless might not be necessarily matching with that of other places in China. According to Lau's analysis, members of the Hong Kong society modified their family, kinship structures and their concepts of values in order to be fitted into the industrialized, modern and urban society of Hong Kong (Lau & Kuan, 1988). Wang Gungwu also remarks the Hong Kong Chinese as "a new kind of China Coast Chinese" (Wang, 1997, p. 162). Nationalistic clauses and passions were eclipsed and failed to become appealing to a larger sector of the society with the take-off of Hong Kong's economy. Utilitarianistic familism took the place of nation to be top priority (Lau, 1984).

Throughout the Cold War period, rivalry between the two superpowers, the USA and the USSR, and their respective allies prevailed from the mid-1940s to the early 1990s. The Cold War politics was characterized by the ideological conflicts between the capitalist camp and the communist camp. The establishment of a strong communist regime in the Mainland inevitably alerted the Hong Kong government and London in the late 1940s. In early 1949, tighter restrictions were placed on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its activities, proved subversive or not. Legislation was passed making it illegal for any society in Hong Kong to affiliate with political organization, except those with the permission of the Governor with the Executive Council. The government chose to be selective in enforcing these regulations. Perhaps to an extent, it tolerated the existence of affiliated institutions of the opposing factions, but considerable powers were retained in laws for controlling the expansion of these organizations.

Amongst all the schools in Hong Kong, "patriotic schools" were the ones which have determined to play a role in the society and prepared students for the rule of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since the 1940s. Not only were there efforts to oppose existent practice during the colonial era, but also attempts to construct an emergent culture that stressed different meanings and values. They were a political, China-centered and patriotic (or nationalistic) faction in Hong Kong. The establishment and existence of patriotic schools reflected educational struggles in Hong Kong between the colonial government and local

patriotic schools over goals and practices of education. This conflict resulted in schooling in effect functioning as a manifestation of a confrontation of the government and the patriotic forces. In varying ways, to differing extents and with unequal power of influence, both were searching to affect educational goals, everyday teaching and learning, curriculum and the national identity prevailed in Hong Kong.

Patriotic Faction in Hong Kong

Factions usually had either traditionalistic or ideological affiliation. The existence of such entity represented a group of people that shared similar goals, code of ethics, concept of values and guiding principles. In many cases, factions shared the burden of governmental functions and activities (Lau, 1980). For example, Po Leung Kuk and Tung Wah Hospital, these Chinese voluntary associations expanded to assume the political function of mediating between the Chinese people and the British authorities during the colonial era (Sinn, 1986; Zheng, 2006). Community organization such as Kaifong Association, clansmen associations, district associations and chambers of commerce also served the targeted Chinese communities in a variety of ways: education, welfare provisions to the needy, political representation, recreation, financial aid, legal aid, cultural preservation and reinforcement of group solidarity (Lau, 1980). The patriotic forces in Hong Kong therefore can be considered as a faction.

Long before the founding of the PRC, a number of socialist sympathizers had already stayed in Hong Kong. Socialism and the communism were about the promise of an ideal utopian world, which was very appealing to the Chinese population in the 1940s when the Kuomintang (KMT) was losing its moral grounds. Notable figures included Qiao Guanhua and his wife Kung Peng, Chang Hanfu and his wife Kung Pusheng (Kung Peng's sister), and the party's literary authorities such as Lin Mo-han, Hsia Yen and Hu Sheng (Catron, 1971). They made use of the accessibility of Hong Kong as outlet for the liberated areas connecting the outside world with both propaganda and trade. These pro-Communist groups formed a broad based United Front with support from some businessmen, intellectuals and sympathetic

newspapers to ensure they would not be out of touch from the masses (Catron, 1971).

Patriotic Critiques of Public School Curriculum

Radical educational critics of the patriotic faction were becoming more aware that Chinese communist viewpoints were being eliminated from schools as they stood in opposition to dominant capitalist interest and to the elitism prevailed in education. The political slant of school was hardly sympathetic to forces that affected social stability and status quo. Yet these patriotic schools kept expressing their protest against the colonial education and linking the public education system directly to its capitalistic and colonial character. For example, public examination was considered as the control of school knowledge by members of the patriotic schools (Wong, 2002). They believed through supervising the assessment of the reproduction of knowledge, government was alleged to have control upon the production and distribution of knowledge. As a result, when the Department of Education announced the plan about Chinese School Certificate Examination (CSCE) in 1951, a number of patriotic schools including Hon Hah, Chung Hah, Pui Kiu and Sun Kiu expressed their unwillingness to prepare students for the CSCE (Wong, 2002). In 1952, 9 teachers wrote to *Wen Wei Pao* criticizing the examination syllabus and concluding that the new examination was an instrument to enslave the youngsters (Wong, 2002). In March of the same year, another three patriotic schools' teachers wrote to reprove the curriculum of geography studies for overlooking China's achievements (Wong, 2002). In the end, many school leavers of these schools declined to take the public examination after they finished 5 years of secondary education to protest against the capitalist education provided by the imperialist and colonialist government.

To promote significant changes from within the colonial educational system, these patriotic schools provided an alternative nationalistic curriculum. During the post-war era, a number of patriotic schools were established to foster pupils for the building of a new China. It included Pui Kiu Middle School, Dade Academy, Heung To Middle School, Hon Wah College, and a number of Workers' Children Schools. They

contributed substantially to cultivate a sense of national identity and loyalty to the PRC and China. The content of their education was wide in range, including knowledge, values, attitudes, and identifications.

The running of these patriotic schools was politically sensitive to the Hong Kong British Government as their existence was interpreted as China's efforts to foster an alternative loyalty in the Colony. It acted as an alternative in curriculum illustration of a form of contestation, a pedagogy resisting the government's colonial curriculum. Hong Kong government therefore tended to consider their teachings as subversive activities attempting to agitate social unrest (Grantham, 1965; Sweeting, 1993).

Patriotic Schools in Facing the Hong Kong British Government

To the patriotic schools, the government curriculum which represented the ideology and the benefit of the British Hong Kong government conflicted with the fundamental principles of the PRC government. The contrast was obvious as Hong Kong was a foreign-ruled capitalist colony, while China was a nationalistic socialist nation-state.

Over the years, the implementation of nationalistic and political education was illegal as it was promoting loyalty to another authority outside of the Hong Kong British Government. Shortly after the founding of the PRC, the Special Bureau of the Education Department (SBED) was established to work with the Special Branch of the police to study communist activities in school. Regulations and educational policies were imposed to control over politics in school (Sweeting, 1993). Three patriotic schools, Dade Academy, and Two Workers' Children School were closed by force on the ground of teaching political subjects (Zhou, 2002). Deportations of teachers and principals, school closings, raids on the schools for illegal teaching materials were not unusual in the 1950s (Zhou, 2002).

The reaction and policies of the government illustrated the attitudes of the Hong Kong government. In their eyes, education in these patriotic schools was being strongly connected with political indoctrination and

communist infiltration. These pro-Beijing faction's schools functioned to foster alternative loyalty by teaching Chinese socialists' values, norms and concepts.

Alternative Curriculum Themes from the Nationalistic and Socialist Perspective

These patriotic schools allied with the political trends of the PRC at that time. Socialist contestation of the patriotic faction took many forms. Amongst all the forms, their insistence on the implementation of pro-Beijing nationalistic education was visible and explicit in the educational system. They practiced national flag-raising ceremony on every National Day. They discussed contemporary achievements of the PRC. They announced their loyalty to the PRC since 1949. Apart from the day schools for children, night schools were also opened for adults. Numerous factory workers went to the night schools after work. These educational ventures provided education in response to the development of industrial capitalism, class struggles, and leftists' ideology. Subjects of more practically or culturally interest to workers, such as vocational training and literacy class were taught.

Specific themes were presented in the curriculum to provide a more concrete indication of the contested and alternative tendency in the face of the mainstream schools. Although not easily separated from each other, three major themes can be highlighted. These themes were emphasized during the period of 1946 to 1984. Various degree of stress was placed at different points of time, yet these themes were constant elements found in the curriculum in the said period (Lau, 2008).

The first theme involved the concept of self-sacrifice. One of the features of these patriotic schools was its affiliation with the socialist China. The pro-Beijing faction by and large imitated the line of thoughts prevailed in Mainland China with varying degree of allegiance in practices. As the members were basically stationed in Hong Kong, contacts, exposure, correspondences, communication and information were rather limited. One of the major sources of information for them was newspapers including *People's Daily*, *Ta Kung Pao* and *Wen Wei*

Pao. Therefore, their acceptance of the campaigns-in-fashion and doctrines of the CCP varied with their own interpretations.

Amongst many of the political campaigns held in the PRC, “Learn from Comrade Lei Feng” campaign was practiced in these patriotic schools at that time. Lei Feng was characterized by propaganda as a selfless person who devoted himself to his country. In 1963, “Learn from Comrade Lei Feng” campaign started and everyone was encouraged to follow his example. However, we should note that Lei Feng did not appear as an individual with strong character. On the contrary, it was his service, his function and his contribution to the whole community which were being praised. The lesson he taught us was infused with a perspective emphasizing the place of the individual in the inter-dependent social world. There was a song memorized the spirit of Lei Feng, which students of the time sung it all the time. The lyrics were inspiring and can enhance the understanding of the spirit of self-sacrifice of the faction.

What a Model! Let’s Learn from Lei Feng!

(Xue xi Lei Feng hao bang yang)

Learn from the model of Lei Feng,
be loyal to the revolution and to the party.

(Xue xi Lei Feng hao bang yang, zhong yu ge ming, zhong yu dang)

Be firm and be grateful, be a resolute to uphold your beliefs.

(Ai zeng fen ming bu wang ben, li chang jian ding dou zhi qiang)

Learn from the model of Lei Feng,
always remember the humble days.

(Xue xi Lei Feng hao bang yang, jian ku pu su yong bu wang)

Dare to play a modest role for strengthening the ideologies of
collectivism.

(Yuan zuo ge ming di luo si ding, ji ti zhu yi si xiang fang guang mang)

Learn from the model of Lei Feng, bear Chairman Mao’s teachings in
mind.

(Xue xi Lei Feng hao bang yang, Mao zhu xi de jiao dao ji xin shang)

Dedicate to serve the peoples of the country,
 what a communist conduct!

(Quan xin quan yi wei ren min, gong chan zhu yi pin ge duo gao shang)

Learn from the model of Lei Feng,
 equipped yourself with Maoism.

(Xue xi Lei Feng hao bang yang, Mao Zedong si xiang la wu zhuang)

Defend your country, grasp your gun,
 striving for improvement without ease.

(Bao wei zuguo wo jin qiang, nu li xue xi tian tian xiang shang)

Cooperative and collectivist rather than competitive and privatized economic relations was a theme in socialist doctrines. Such concepts were in line with the concept of scarifying one's interests for the benefit of the country. As a result, large amount of school chores and students activities were organized. Students had vast experience to "work together". Pictures in school journals also depicted students' involvement in social and community services. In *The Thirty Years in PKMS* (Pui Kiu Middle School), pictures showing students harvesting in farm (p. 34), moving bricks (p. 47), repairing school's roof (p. 44), doing chores (p. 44–52) are abundant (PKMS, 1976).

Self-sacrifice was highly praised. Act of selfless good deeds for the majority stresses the importance of collectivism rather than the separate individualism. To keep the school running and providing inexpensive education to the disadvantaged children, the staff, both the teaching staff and the non-teaching staff, of patriotic schools was receiving wages much lower than regular staff of mainstream schools. This financial arrangement lasted until 1991 when the schools joined the Direct Subsidy Scheme. Teaching in these patriotic schools was therefore considered as an act of self-sacrifice. To provide low-priced education to the poor, they were scarifying individual monetary interests for the society and the masses.

A second theme involved an emphasis on socialism. As these patriots believed socialism and Chinese communist party was the only available choice for achieving a strong and prosperous China, their teaching was full of ideas and doctrines of socialism. In particular, if we

focus on the period of 1967–1977, in which the Proletariat Cultural Revolution took place.

Although students in Hong Kong lived in urbanized society and might not share much feeling of their mainland counterparts, students were organized to have a taste of the experience of the workers, peasants and soldiers. The use of drama in narrative depictions of lived experience widened students' horizon and enriched their life experience. Students of Hong Kong did not have much chance to work in farming villages and in factories. Identification with people of other walks of life could be learnt through these role-playing experiences. Through playing these roles of the proletariat, of the farming population and of the lower class repeatedly in their performances, students developed an empathetic understanding in stories of other lives. The domain of arts in this way could be conceptualized with symbolic meanings extracting from lives of peasants, workers and soldiers.

Roles of the working class and the peasants were highly praised and imitated in the following performances (PKMS, 1996):

Women Textile Workers (1975)

The Swineherds (1977)

A Little Sentry (1977)

Bok Choy Distribution/ Donation (1978)

Apple Harvest Festival (1979)

The third theme focused on anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism was a crucial element in the development of Chinese nationalism in the history of Hong Kong. Specific social problems of the rule of the colonial government were discussed in the schools amongst teachers and students. Social problems were viewed as the features of the capitalist society and the corruption of the alien government. Colonialism together with ills of capitalism was considered as a main theme for the teaching of nationalistic education at the time.

Historical data and folk stories were reviewed in different perspectives in class discussion of history lessons and class teacher lessons. For instance, history of the Boxer Uprising was no longer viewed as national humiliation. Instead it became an evidence to prove

the invasion of Western imperialism and the courage of the lower class. Taiping Rebellion was also praised as a peasant rebellion in facing the ruling of an alien Manchurian government. To them, Hong Kong, a British colony in the ruling of an alien government, appeared as a symbol of Western imperialism. Peasant leaders in Taiping Rebellion and Boxer Uprisings were attempts to overthrow alien rulers (of the Manchurians) in history. The messages in these incidents went well with the historical conditions of the time and place in Hong Kong during the colonial years.

Again, in the film appreciation activities, model opera films of *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* and *On the Dock* matched some features of the historical background of Hong Kong and earned the applause of the young audiences. In the story of *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*, Chinese soldiers were fighting the U.S. forces to help our neighboring country Korea. The U.S. was depicted as a force of imperialism exploiting a developing Asian country, Korea, which shared similar culture with the Chinese. Helping Korea was described as an act of justice. The overture of the story of *On the Dock* expressed the lofty sentiments of the Chinese working class and the high aspiration of “having the whole country in mind and the whole world in view”. In the end, re-education given by the Chinese communists solved the puzzles without much difficulty. Western administration was portrayed as the opposition of any good deeds. The administration and social problems of Hong Kong was considered as reflections of Western imperialism, capitalism and colonialism. The disapproval and reprimand on Western imperialism mirrored the attitudes of the patriotic schools toward the colonial government and the capitalist world.

Conclusion

The discussion in this paper illuminated the existence of past contestation. These patriotic schools developed a critical perspective and a body of materials, curriculum and activities for conducting an alternative curriculum in the period of 1946–1984. This alternative curriculum was nationalistic, politicalized and anti-hegemonic. It was in the opposition of the mainstream colonial pedagogies, which aimed to

promote social stability, capitalist values, apolitical attitude and de-nationalistic fashion.

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愛國人士在香港的教育實踐：1946–1984

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摘要

本文嘗試透過愛國學校的歷史了解教育與權力兩者的關係。從了解愛國學校在殖民時期的校本課程，證明學校並非完全依附於強霸及統治階級；而教育也不一定是完全被動的工具。教育的目的、內容、操作和評估其實一直都不斷轉變，被挑戰和重整。劉兆佳在1980年代曾形容香港為一個充斥著「功利家庭主義」及「漠視政治」的「低度整合的社會」，當時的愛國學校卻推行著一種反建制的愛國教育。本文嘗試透過這群本土愛國人士的教育實踐（1946–1984），了解學校在霸權文化及精英主義下的自主力。

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